

For immediate release
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RICE IS LIFE

Vancouver Museum Curates

First Ever Canadian Exhibit Dedicated to Rice!

Created in partnership with the Canadian Society for Asian Arts

The Vancouver Museum introduces its latest exhibit *Rice is Life*, co-created by **Paula Swart**, Curator of Asian Studies at the Vancouver Museum and **Margo Palmer**, Director of the Canadian Society for Asian Arts. This extraordinary exhibit explores the significance of **rice** through history, cultivation, culture, religion, ritual, science and modern day challenges of sustainability.

Why rice matters? Rice is deeply embedded in the culture and heritage of societies from Asia to Australia, from the Americas to Africa. In much of Asia, rice, ritual, and religion are inseparable due to the widespread belief that the rice plant was divinely given to humans, often by a goddess or "rice mother."

Rice is eaten for good luck at the Lunar New Year, offered to ancestors and deities, made into spectacular displays for festivals and tossed over newly wedded couples. In the form of rice wine, it is served to guests and poured as a libation to mark sacred rituals.

Rice is the staple food of over half of the world's population. In Asia alone, more than 2 billion people obtain most of their energy intake from rice-based foods. The UN reports that rice makes up 20% of the world's dietary supply and over 1 billion households worldwide depend on rice production as a source of income. Cultivated for over 5,000 years in more than 100 countries, on every continent except Antarctica, rice sustains two-thirds of the world's population.

A major scientific breakthrough was reported in 2001, when the rice genome became the first food crop to be successfully decoded. Knowledge of the genome is expected to provide the basic information required to engineer new types of rice.

Yet the situation for many of the world's rice producers is grim. The spectre of increased hunger, malnutrition, poverty and conflict in the coming decades resulted in the declaration by the United Nations General Assembly of the year 2004 as the International Year of Rice (IYR). Devoting a year to a staple food was an unprecedented step in the history of the United Nations. The growing and eating of rice are so fundamental to daily life in many cultures that rice has become intimately entwined with individual identity, social organization, and artistic expression.

Rice is Life, exploring the agricultural, spiritual and artistic significance of rice, opens on **May 4, 2007** – January 1, 2008 at the Vancouver Museum 1100 Chestnut Street in Vanier Park near Granville Island. Hours: Tuesday-Sunday 10am to 5pm, Thursday until 9pm. **Info: 604-736-4431** www.vanmuseum.bc.ca

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Interviews in Japanese, Mandarin & Cantonese, Dutch, French, and Afrikaans

Images available upon request